DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 253 SP 031 620

AUTHOR Whitaker, Suzanne; Fowler, Kathleen
TITLE Consensus Decision Making.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Effectiveness; *Change Agents; Elementary Secondary Education; Governance; *Participative Decision Making; *Policy Formation; *Principals; *Teacher Influence

ABSTRACT

Consensus decisionmaking is a tool which utilizes the talents and knowledge of school personnel and recognizes the dignity and worth of each individual member of the staff. This process recognizes the abilities and dedication of the teachers and focuses on the organization as a whole, rather than individual facets of the organization. Because of their increased participation in the decisionmaking process, teachers develop a sense of pride and ownership about the policies in their schools. In this discussion of consensus decisionmaking in the schools, the principal is seen as the most effective individual for developing the structure in which participative decisionmaking can occur, and for providing the climate in which it can flourish. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED312253

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Fowler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Suzanne Whitaker, Teacher
Effective School Program Coordinator
New Iberia Senior High School
1301 East Admiral Doyle Drive
New Iberia, LA 70560
318-369-6714

Kathleen Fowler, Assistant Principal
New Iberia Senior High School
1301 East Admiral Doyle Drive
New Iberia, LA 70560
318-369-6714

SP 031 620

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING: THE NECESSARY PROCESS FOR MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM THE TRADITIONAL METHOD OF MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION TO THE CONTEMPORARY METHOD OF MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FOR SCHOOLS STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE.

Society today demands that the educational system be more responsive to the changes that are a consequence of the high tech world in which we now live. Reforms must go beyond paper and headlines and provide a realistic and continuing basis for change. Traditional educational structures are no longer adequate to meet the needs of our nation. Effective school programs must recognize the new demands, and educational institutions must be restructured to insure the survival of our nation as well as to provide for the well being of our people.

Traditional theory in management provides for the upper echelon of management to make the decisions regarding policy. When transferred to the school setting, the state, local school boards, superintendents, and principals traditionally make the decisions that provide the framework for the day to day routine. Naisbitt, in his book MEGATRENDS, signaled the beginning of a reform movement in both organizational structure and management style by identifying a shift from a representative democracy to a participatory democracy. Naisbitt claimed that "people whose lives are affected by a decision must be part of the process of arriving at that decision." In an educational setting, teachers and students are most affected by decisions. Encouraging participation in the decision-making process signals a shift to the empowerment

of all professional personnel. Empowerment is a necessary ingredient for schools striving for excellence, and excellence can only be a permanent achievement if educators and their clients become part of the change process.

Traditionally, direction and empowerment were the sole prerogative of the state and local school boards. This led to the establishment of a bureaucracy which stifled the creativity, imagination and entrepreneurship of educators in general. This structure did not allow schools to be flexible, adaptive, or responsive to change. Change, according to Robert H. Waterman, Jr., in The Renewal Factor, is the only constant in today's world. He said that direction and empowerment must be combined to accommodate this change. Plans for improvement must reflect the realities of change--they must be fluid, flexible, and realistic. Change puts excitement back into education. The principal is the catalyst for change--he encourages, inspires, nurtures, nudges, and supports teachers in their decision making, but teachers must be the source of the change. Their participation motivates them to work and commits them to the success of a program of excellence. Together, principals and teachers create an organizational structure that is more creative, flexible, and adaptive to change. The consensus decision making process provides the framework for teamwork and trust to be established.

Traditionally, states and local school boards have been reluctant to change, finding comfort in the status quo. When change did occur, more often than not it was reactionary and became a paper shuffling activity of short duration. Tom Smith, in Thriving on Chaos, says excellence can only be achieved through constant

improvement and constant change. He identifies quality and flexibility as the "hallmarks for success." The focus should be on "what can be." Quality, according to Smith, can only be attained through people. Bureaucratic rules and humiliating conditions must be removed for quality success. The educational heirarchy must recognize that people are our nation's greatest asset. Teachers have the necessary knowledge and judgement to establish programs of excellence and must become a visible force in educational reform. Principals must provide a positive climate in which teachers' needs for trust and integrity are satisfied. Shared decision making utilizing the consensus decision making process provides the catalyst for effective change.

Traditionally, the state, local school boards, and central office staffs have served as command posts dictating policies which sometimes serve to destroy professional morale. In Winning the Brain Race, David T. Kearns advocates that the state, local school boards, as well as central office staffs must become service centers. As Governor Booth Gardner of Washington says, "We want to remove the shackles of bureaucracy and regulation that inhibit creativity and initiative in our schools." Policies should be established by individual schools in order to better serve the needs of both their external and internal clients. The state, local school boards, and central office staffs should assist individual schools in their efforts to best serve the needs of their clientele.

It is imperative that the educational system be restructured and that the management style be changed to accommodate the demands

of our rapidly changing world. The educational entity can no longer isolate itself from the reality of the world in which it exists. If it is to be effective, it must shed its bureaucratic characteristics and must adopt the successful strategies of the business world. Effective school programs tap the human resources necessary to implement change, but since change often invokes fear, the consensus decision making process can eliminate the fear and facilitate the change.

Consensus decision making is a tool which utilizes the talents and knowledge of school personnel and recognizes the dignity and worth of each individual member of the staff. This process recognizes that teachers are among the most talented, most creative, and most dedicated people in the world. It focuses on the organization as a whole, rather than individual facets of the organization. By its nature, consensus decision making prevents self-interest from becoming part of any decisions. School improvement cannot be accomplished without the cooperation and dedication of the entire staff, and consensus decision making provides school personnel with the opportunity to be part of the change process and provides the mechanism for them to contribute ideas that will serve as the basis for change. Because of their increased participation in the decision-making process, teachers develop a sense of pride and ownership about the policies in their school. This ownership of the change process will insure that improvement is achieved because people are willing to support what they create.

The consensus decision making process provides the most efficient and effective means of identifying problems, generating solutions

to those problems, and implementing plans of action to eliminate such problems. It is a means of analyzing and solving problems through a step by step process.

The process allows the individual school to establish the policies that will be most effective in meeting the needs of their clients. The process is even utilized to determine the needs of the clients. Because the process requires documentation as well as participation by all members of the organization, the accountability of a system can be measured school by school. This measure of accountability identifies quality and provides the flexibility to solve problems.

The consensus decision making process is the vital characteristic of a successful effective school program. It becomes the vehicle that provides for a participatory democracy, gives direction and empowerment, provides for constant improvement and change, and allows state and local boards to function as service centers.

The objectives of the effective school movement are to implement a structure and process for school improvement, to facilitate the coordination and delivery of services and support to systems and schools, and to promote communication and sharing at all levels.

The school principal plays a <u>crucial role</u> in the effective school process. Before the effective school process can begin, the principal must set the stage for it to be successful. He/she does this by meeting with the faculty and explaining that the effective school process provides the opportunity for teachers to participate in making the decisions and establishing the policies which will serve to improve their school. The enthusiasm with which the principal endorses the effective school process will determine the

degree to which the faculty will participate in the process. The principal's enthusiasm will serve as a catalyst for tannsforming the talents and efforts of the staff into results. His/her enthusiasm further assists the members of the staff to fulfill their potential as professional educators.

It is during this initial meeting that the principal must define the effective school process. It is imperative that the principal emphasize the following:

1. **Boundaries:** The teachers are to use this opportunity to improve their school, and not the local or state educational systems. The nationally established Criteria of Excellence provide the framework for areas in which teachers can evaluate and improve their school. These areas include the principal as a leader, instruction, curriculum, assessment, climate, and parental and community involvement.
2. **Organizational Structure;** The principal shall exhibit the structure that will be used by the members of the faculty to improve the school. Faculty members shall be divided into teams of teachers, each team having a chairman and recorder. Additionally, there should be a core committee composed of teachers trained in the consensus decision making process and familiar with the effective school process. Faculty liaisons (who function as intermediaries between the teacher committees and the administration) should also be appointed. While the principal reserves the right to appoint all of the above positions, he should exercise care when choosing those who will serve in positions of leadership. His selection should be based on

their abilities to lead and facilitate the school improvement process. As a group, they should constitute a cross-representation of the school faculty. As individuals, they should have earned the respect of their peers.

3. **Rules of Operation:** All teachers must abide by the rules of operation established for successful committee meetings.
   a. Members will criticize ideas, not people.
   b. All teachers must be punctual.
   c. All teachers must participate.
   d. All teachers must respect the ideas of their peers and agree that once a consensus has been reached, all will support it.

4. **Consensus Decision Making Process:** The teachers must use this process as the vehicle for improvement.

   The first step of the consensus decision making process is to identify the problem or need. Brainstorming and discussion should be used to clarify the problem by identifying both strengths and weaknesses.

   The second step involves problem analysis. After the areas of weakness are identified, groups should determine the causes of the problem so the solutions can address those causes. Documentation should be provided that identifies the cause to insure that the solutions do not attack merely the symptoms of the problem.

   Step three involves solution selection. Groups should brainstorm solutions to the problem and then begin to

consolidate and prioritize solutions. A cost-benefit analysis should be done, if necessary, to determine the feasibility of a particular plan.

Once a plan of action is agreed upon, groups should develop a formal plan of action.

5. **Plans of Action:** The teachers must devise plans for improvement that are reasonable and realistic. All plans must recognize existing legal policies and must be financially feasible. Plans should include the objective, define steps to be taken, establish a timeline for implementation, designate responsibilities, and determine a method of evaluation.

6. **Climate:** The principal establishes a climate of trust by making a committment to his/her faculty to implement all teachers' plans of action which are in compliance with the aforementioned guidelines. He also must make a concerted effort to provide the teachers with the information, resources, and experts necessary to devise their plans of action. Most importantly, the principal does not interfere in the decision making process employed by the teachers. The only time a principal attends a teacher committee meeting is when the committee extends an invitation or a request for him to do so. By doing so, the principal delivers a very positive message which demonstrates his confidence in the teachers by giving them the freedom to make decisions independently.

While the principal plays a crucial role in the effective school

process, it is the teachers who will become the key to its success. The principal recognizes and respects the intelligence, talents and abilities of his/her teachers when he promises not to impose upon their committee endeavors. The use of the consensus decision-making process gives the principal the confidence that all policies will reflect a professional effort in which the benefit of the entire school is the first consideration. The degree to which the effective school program will be successful will be determined by the degree of enthusiasm exhibited by the principal at the initial stage of implementation. If the principal commits in a "whole-hearted" manner, the faculty will follow suit. It is at this time that the principal creates the environment which will support and encourage change within an atmosphere of honesty and fairness. The consensus decision making process provides the means for the teachers to prove their true value and worth. It prepares them for the transition in management styles of education, as they will be ready to share in the decisions that will make education a 21st century enterprise.